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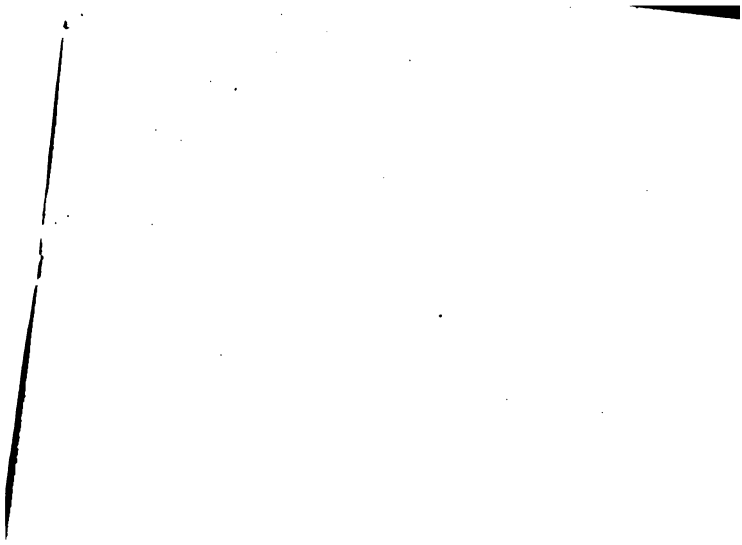
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1. Sonnets, American.





The Heart and The Crown

The Heart and The Crown

by

H. Rea Woodman

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To the highest in my life — my keenest joy, my greatest grief.

WOR 19 FEB 36

The King's Heart



I

AS Hester Prynne, in her prison cell,
Embroidered the scarlet with lines of gold,—
Beautiful, intricate stitches which told
Of a passion's depth words could not tell,
Because she loved love too wholly well,—
So I 'broider my pain, stitch it about
With fair, useless lines, in and out, in and out,
Dreaming, as I work, how our love befell.
And every delicate stitch, Dear Heart,
Tender, exquisite, wrought fast and true,
Is making a marvel of what was mere woe,
A barren, desolate thing apart.
And I know now why, the wan days through,
That sweet woman 'broidered the scarlet so.

II

WHAT, do you ask, would my heart bring to you?
Not purple — that 's fit for a king's low pride,
And can be torn, stained, cast aside;
For the king's wide ermine is edged with rue
And heavy with heartache through and through:
Not gold — it is the one fair thing
That lovers can not to lovers bring,
Except in the heart of the pansy's blue.
I could not bring to my love's clean hand
What the world daily soils in careless ease,
Though it were born, virgin-pure, of the sod;
Gifts fit for men — power, fame, gain, land —
I shake my soul quite, quite free from these;
I would bring love to you — that 's fit for God!

III

"YOU are unjust to me," you wrote yesterday.
Wherever I look I can see the words,
Can hear them above the bees and the birds;
The pulse has gone out of the throbbing May,
For I am unjust — unjust to you, you say.
It seems the last thing that could be true,
That I — I could be unjust to you.
I can think of heaven's blue being gray —
Of a world without blue — the blue of your eyes!
I can think of the stars weary of shining
In the far, still, dim, vast void above;
Of the mother-God turning from the cries
Of our impotent shrinkings and pining . . .
But I — unjust to you — unjust, oh, my Love!

IV

SOMEWHERE or other I read to-day
A poet's query: Where would you spend
Your very last hour if all life should end
With horrent shriek, with blare, blaze and bray —
When things go to bits like a child's mad play?
Supposing that you knew, the poet said,
The hour after the worlds would be dead?
I said to my soul, "Where would you spend it — say?"
That hour . . . when all life bursts at the core;
World shouting with dying curse to world,
The heavens bellowing hollow alarms,
The seas, affronted, answering roar for roar,
With wave and monster and ship uphurled —
My soul said, "I would spend that hour in his arms!"

V

I CAN not think that you meant it, dear,
And indeed and indeed I did not mind
At the time — I but thought you color-blind!
But to-day there came a fleck of fear,
Just a fleck, like the first spot of sear
When no one dreams autumn. I tell you quick
Before the spot makes the bright leaf sick,
And autumn's drear fall on moor and mere.
You know that day we saw in the shop
The picture of the girl with gold hair,
And you said you liked yellow hair the best?
Well, my hair is n't gold, and you must stop
Whatever you 're doing and speak me fair
And tell me you don't and kiss back my rest!

VI

SOMEWHERE to-night, in the city's din,
Cries, prayers, moans, curses, roar upon roar,
Hoarse, shrill, tense, bitter, the city before
And about you, its humanity thin
And grotesque in its common-place sin —
Superb, sometimes, in its reaches for right,
But hoping, alike, in weakness and might,
Some far, long-wished joy to enter in,
You hear my voice, you see my eyes,
As if you mused, deep, on the star-lit sea,
Keeping solemn tryst on that crowded mart.
The splendid clamor and glitter dies —
All your being is calling out for me —
O Heart, I come, I come — O trysting heart!

VII

YOU will be here next Wednesday, you write;
For an instant the words pulsed red
On the page. "I shall see him!" I said.
Then the thought, "It 's a week!" and the white
Gleamed blank on my awakened sight.
Seven whole days, for there is no hope
The god's will shorten that age's scope,
For when did the gods care for lovers' plight?
The day after the day after to-morrow
I can say, "In four days I shall see him!"
And the day after the day after that
I can say, "Love, to-morrow!" nor sorrow
For the tedious week, lost and dim
In the blinding joy of the day after that!

VIII

FOR the number of heart-leaps called "a week,"—
I borrow the phrase from the stupid world,
Who, with his imagination furled
Close and tight, does not dream to seek
A language wherein lovers may speak,—
For "a week" your picture has been in my room,
Its sufficient presence, its music and bloom;
The dear shadow-shapes and fancies that peek
About, in and out, now many, now one,
Have stilled to quiet; I have brought no flowers,
I have not lured the silver moonlight
Nor called the poets. I have not done
Anything to ornament the hours
Since your picture came, just "a week" to-night.

IX

SHAKESPEARE says,—now pardon me, Sweet,
As if there were aught he does not say
In his packed, incisive, all-human way,
His blood keeping time to the myriad beat
Of all hearts, to the tramp of all feet!—
He says that love is not love that alters
When it alteration finds, nor falters
Though tempests of hate about it meet.
Your love has altered since the night words came,
"I love you utterly!" Mine has changed, too;
Your love for me has grown deeper and faster,—
Is not that change?—and mine, from a tame
Still-eyed thing to this passion my life breaks through.
Manifestly, he is wrong, the dear Master.

X

IF no convention stood, if no bar stayed
Our lives from mingling together;
If for us there were fair weather,
June joy, and the boughs and the grasses swayed
To make us music; if we were not bayed
On every hand by man's stolid frown
Beating our noblest impulses down;
If, for us, some great, gracious god had made
A broad, straight road we could walk in free,
And wear our crowns, and not sheathe our eyes,
Bear each the other's daily needs, nor miss
The simple, homely service we see
Other lovers giving, nor knowing the prize —
Why, dear, I think we would die of that bliss.

XI

OF her, believe me, no jealous thoughts throng.
You need not tell her of the gift I send;
Let the knowledge of that begin and end
In our hearts' stillest places. If any wrong
Has accrued to her from my pain, low and long;
If my finding you the man among men
Made for me in the beginning, when
God was planning his world sure and strong—
At least I have not urged my claim,
Nor mentioned God's desire in the matter.
I can look in her eyes with as clean a pride
As the right that shields her your name,
As white as rose petals that scatter!
Only, see what she has—and God on my side.

XII

AND He really is on my side, that God
Men talk of so loudly and learnedly
And ignore so unconcernedly;
He is on my side, not because His rod
Has scourged me deep, nor because His sod
Must yield a grave for this love of ours,
Entomb the bright joy, enurn the hours
That, though all denied, led no less to God.
He only stands in our thought, you know,
For the everlasting on-going of things;
He has no rod, no throne, no reach
Over the dim worlds' vast come and go;
He is our hope given purple and wings—
I only mean nature made us each for each.

XIII

IT is to-day and now I say "To-morrow!"
The week has dragged its long length through,
Interminable in the May's blue,
And now I am trying to steal or borrow
Patience from somewhere — somebody's sorrow
Must yield me its fruit. I must live, you see,
Till to-morrow finally reaches me.
What a strait — to have to steal or borrow!
But if I live on the power I own,—
Sound and firm as far as it goes,—
It will be exhausted when my call
Is loudest, when my tense need makes moan.
Joy eats up strength — I know its throes;
How for to-morrow, if patience has used all?

XIV

YOU shall not slur my sacrifice
Nor call it less than great. Because desire
Has broken bounds, a devastating fire
To burn love black,—leave blanched bones to rise
From the scorched plains to kill our eyes
When we face all the years that have been,—
Would you have, then, this love bitter and thin,
Shrinking — crouching — behind disgust and lies?
To that I offer up love's crowning joy;
You and I are too deeply bred
Of the moral stuff of the race . . . to see
Our love sicken to death with that alloy . . .
To see — Forgive me, my anger is sped
And my thick tears take your part against me!

XV

IT is to-day and now I say "Yesterday!"
All morning here at my writing-table
I have sat very still, hardly able
To move for fear I disturb the way
The draperies fall 'round my yesterday!
Beautiful memory-draperies that fold
Like a silken — molten — cloth of gold!
My breast seems to rhyme to their subtle sway,
My heart to listen their liquid murmur.
There are letters to write, books to review
My table is piled with potent hints
For a week's work. Yet I am afraid to stir
Lest you speak and I do not hear you —
Lest I miss any glints of those rose-gold tints!

XVI

LAST night, as the amethyst mist fringed day's space,
I walked alone down a country road,
So tranquil I did not feel the load
Of our mutual woe in its usual place.
Somehow, the evening's madonna face
Had smiled on my grief's heart unaware
And left its lavender memory there.
As I walked,— sweet my Lord, gi' me your grace! —
I saw a broad field of red clover.
Then, sudden, a man's face stood in the night —
No, the man himself,— I could hear him breathe! —
A man years ago my — my lover.
I looked into his eyes . . . into the bright
Clear deeps — down, down to the white truth beneath!

XVII

I TELL you this, not to rouse jealous spleen,—
I detest such low, mincing subterfuge,
Folly simple, vacuous, huge!—
But because I would have no truth between
You and me not threshed to wheat. I mean
You must know straight that this love we bear
Was not smirched by that wakened moment there.
There was no sweep of delight; no sheen
Of regret glamoured — only wide surprise.
Out of it, what? This. If, from future twilight
Your face leap to surprise me, I pray
I may look at you with as palm-clean eyes
As I looked into his face last night —
No fear, no remorse. Is not that victory? — say!

XVIII

"LOST, somewhere between sunrise and sunset,
One golden hour"—you know the old rhyme
Held over our heads in the far child-time
When we would dawdle and dream and forget?
Though grief-grown to full stature now, I yet
Dawdle and dream much as I used to do,
And lose half to-day living yesterday through!
But of all losses my conscience has met—
Or will meet, I trust—is this one here now,
Looming stark and drear as I bow my head:
Lost: One whole, long, fair, blue, shining June day.
At its violet velvet edge I bow
And sob my heart out over my dead,
For I have been angry with you, dear, all day.

XIX

WAS it anger, I wonder, that thick
Heavy dullness that clogged my heart,
And did not even pale or start
When the thoughts of you throbbed dry and quick,
Wood beating on wood, empty stick on stick
Piling high and higher, a mean tenement
Of vacant rooms, where my spirit lent
A fearful presence, terror-haunted, sick
Of self, yet too dull to seek fresh air,
Too clumsy to rise and walk into the light,
Too suffering to hope or to dread?
Gaunt shapes stole up and down the stair
And voices whispered the live-long night,
Saying over and over the thing you said.

XX

BUT this morning I am well; pulse clear
As a silver chime; my spirit high
And steady and bold. If God were by
It would not fail the comparison's sheer
White light, for the good physician was here;
Most tender is he, with his grave, sad eyes,
Where the love the world calls "Christ" low lies.
The physician Forgiveness healed me, dear,
In the dreadful night, as I lay so ill.
And now I know that as long as I live
I must love you, my king, with an added pain —
The god-pain of forgiveness' infinite thrill.
So well I love you now, I would give
All the loss and the pain and illness again.

XXI

LAST night I dreamed of you, Dear Heart,—
Just think, for the very, very first time
Since our love's resonance struck rhyme!
I did not cry out nor stare nor start
When I saw you come as if a part
Of the pregnant over-calm that steals
Our fretted senses and wholes and heals.
I 've met you at last on the quaint dream mart!
You said to me,—never were words so fair!
How could you?—"Dear, our love has a way!"
Your smile was so high that to die at your feet
Had been easy—killed by the triumph there!
Then—just blank day. My heart has turned gray
With anxiety. Oh, tell me the way, Sweet!

XXII

AH yes, I knew you would see the best so.
Your letter is wholly noble — yourself,
And now lies deep in my breast, my sole wealth.
So it is sealed and stamped, our great No,
To lie in state as the years come and go.
We deny love, but when death closes in,
What now is sacrifice, Life will call sin.
I know it. We break to the world's low
Adjustment of things, mixed and absurd,
Which we all laugh at, but can not correct.
We break, not being the sort that bend,
And break in silence, with look, not word —
Unless in that written No one detect
A sound that will thunder on till the end.

XXIII

WE are quite ready, my soul and I,
For his coming — his coming the last.
We know no future, we acknowledge no past,
Just now we are, my soul and I —
All else is tinsel, all else is lie.
We have brushed and braided our hair,
Enwound it with ribbons and seed-pearls fair;
We have put on the sweet garments that sigh
For the garish day from the chest's rose-gloom;
We have put on our arms the jewels that thrill
To the light like the eye of the seer.
We have cleaned and straightened and aired the room,
And now we wait, my soul and I, so still
When his step rings clear we are sure to hear.

XXIV

OUR garments are folded in the rose-gloom.
The pearls that we wore in our hair last night
Dream of the sea, locked safe and tight;
To dream alway, that is the pearl's high doom,
Of the purple deeps and the sounding boom!
I think that my heart has not beat to-day,
Only pumped, a red organ of clay,
Yet it sounds, distinct, in this empty room.
In the darkness that dreadful dove's mild plaint
Beats like a muffled blow. Does n't she know
Yet the grief that sits tired — dead — awhile?
She 's but "half-taught in anguish"; no taint
Of relief stains my grief. His eyes, grave, low,
Steady — I am so glad he did not smile!

XXV

I HEARD on the street to-day your name.
What the men were saying I do not know;
Erect, I walked straight past them, and so
Down the street. But your name, a crimson flame,
Flared around me and I joyed without blame.
My spirit leaped to meet its fire,
Just as it used, O Soul's Desire,
As I walked in the flame and the pride of your name!
It purged my rebel spirit God-clean;
It said the things your silence has kept;
It wrapped me close — the same . . . the same!
It warmed the cold of the years between;
It kissed all the tears my heart has wept —
As a queen to her bridal I walked in your name!

The Queen's Crown



I

IT was dead, I thought, my grief for her,
And I mourned my two graves side by side;
My sister was dead and my grief had died—
To each grave I brought roses and myrrh.
Which grave was dearer,—the grave of her
I had loved or the grave of that grief
Which had brought to my aching loss relief,
I could not tell. To each I brought myrrh
And spices and tears; by each I knelt
And looked long into the starry spaces.
But last night my grief, like Aaron's rod,
Budded and bloomed; again I felt
That low, thick moan in the healed places.
"There is no death." I thank you, dear God.

II

THIS flimsy, blatant world is no place
For a solemn great grief to live in:
It is not that it is crowded with sin,—
Sin? — why, "all the sin wherewith the face
Of man is blacken'd" yields to the grace
Of a pure white grief; stands to one side,
Head bared, forgets it has cheated and lied
For the gracious moment of grief's passing space.
It is not the world's strong passions that kill
The nobler selves we would live up to,
But its petty demands, its vacant sighs
For the vague, vapid, vagrant gauds that still
Environ us close, though we wake to rue.
Whiteness can not live with these and grief dies.

III

DECEMBER the Third — your wedding day.
Do you mind how the Kansas sunshine
Caressed the world that day, Sister of mine?
How it smiled and beckoned? Why, it lay
Like a benison — it rainbowed your way!
The doors stood open, the grass was still green
Under the maple leaves, a silver-gray sheen
Embridaled the prairies that December's May!
Your brilliant beauty was sheathed. Was it awe
You felt at the slow words the grave man spoke?
And your eyes,—oh, your eyes! — their light seemed drowned
In some far sea you dreamed rather than saw;
The perfume of your look was a sweet jar broke
At the feet of some Christ but newly found.

IV

I HAVE looked at your picture so long
The world seems at absolute pause;
Suspended now are the primal laws—
All things that twist and twirl and throng,
The myriad thrill and lilt and song
Are at balance. Oh, lean from your heaven,
Your beautiful, beautiful heaven!—
Pity can not lead an angel wrong!—
Lean down and put your hand on my eyes!
I would, sweet girl, if I were up there,
And you down here in this pulseless room,—
I would, though seven times seven skies
Of crystal sapphire ensphered me there,—
I would ask God for you to let your tears come.

V

WHEN you went away, when you left the earth
As a gilt toy outgrown; when you turned
To higher uses, as one who has learned
The lessons a dear book holds, and knows their worth
Lies now in forgetting — a joyant birth
From sheer knowledge that clogs and veils and holds
To power which straightens, frees and unfolds, —
When you went away from the gay green mirth,
Where did you go, Dear, — ah, whisper me, where?
I look at the stars, the clouds, the brow
Of the mountains, the waves of the river,
All things that are high and glistening and rare,
And the sole question comes, "Where is she now?"
Will the question beat in my mind forever?

VI

AND if it be so that the thing we are
Began before earth and will last beyond,—
A hope the hopeless have found void and fond!—
If it be so that from star to star
We pass in cycles of life fixed and far,
Using these things that glimmer and shine
As media to grow through, O life of mine,
We shall meet her again, as star kisses star!
Let the question beat in my mind till flesh
Be so worn that the life leaps through,
And, questing wide, pulse brave in other veins,
Growing beyond and beyond mere rose-mesh,
Until, somewhere in the star-strewn blue,
We flash together, sublimed past flesh-gains!

VII

NO gifts, Dear Heart, this Christmas tide
Can our desolate hands bring to you —
Only tears and longing, lilies and love and rue;
No lingering over fair things to decide
Which will best become your beauty's high pride;
No fearful choice, to be half regretted
The moment after, to be held and petted
In secret till the day's glad gates are wide;
No gifts, Dear Heart, with love select,
Can reach you where you are; only our thought
And longing, sorrow and pansies and rue;
Within and without the Christ-day is decked,
But to us its joy is sorrow enwrought.
It is Christmas, yes,— Christmas without you.

VIII

I AM thinking of that clean April day—
"Clean," I call it; there was not a speck,
Not a flaw, not a mote, not a fleck
One could hide behind to get away
From something one feared—just plain honest day,
Direct, piercing, calm, its gold doors flung wide,
A day made to cope with your noble pride;
The angels did not deny you your way,
Your bright-eyed courage when death came near.
Some die when enshrouding night takes death's part;
Some, amid shock, glare, uproar, too soon
To know fear; some, sense dead, do not hear
Death's step. You, with a courage that breaks my heart,
You died conscious, silent, in the candid noon.

IX

TO say what your last silence seems to me,
I would give — I would give all I hope in life.
Could I find words that would cut, like a knife,
Meanings clean and whole; words one can see
To the depths of like diamonds, nor be
Cheated in the looking by beauty's form;
Words bleak, benign, sharp, cold yet crimson warm —
Oh, could I tell you how it seems to me,
That courage of yours, I could breathe death too,
When I 'd told you, with the slow-spending sigh
Of one who has lived to do all that he dreamed!
It was the kingliest thing . . . my heart breaks through
The coarse words; colorless, barren they lie,
Shattered and chill — I have failed all I dreamed.

X

TO-DAY in my blood stirred the vibrant hum
Of new spring. So I lifted my head and rose
And walked through streets where traffic goes;
Saw it all afresh as one just come
From some far place, eyes washed and dumb;
The very same world we knew together,—
Brilliant, arrogant, empty, clever,
Humanity's paltry, tremendous sum!
And I found myself almost smiling, free,
With the old light, shrugging disdain,
When in a stab the thought cut keen,
"She will never see it again with me!"
One world for you and one for me . . . and your gain
Of an infinitude of worlds between!

XI

AS one who wakens from slumber so deep
That character is wiped out, as a sponge
Annuls all that is, — a sudden lunge
From the vast blank into the swirling sweep
Of things, — stands confused, blinded, bruised with sleep,
So I stood when the words had burned in
That you were dead. No, not burned in;
Those words lay wide in the outer deep
Where no moan stirred, nor tears nor light.
You had died at noon, the paper said;
"Peacefully" — that superb word was there.
Not a minute before I had laughed, bright,
At the boy's pencil. Dead . . . the paper said,
And my world fell down at my feet — on the stair.

XII

AND then, when the pitiless morning came,
To pick up my scattered world from the stair —
Take up the uses of life again, where
I had dropped them; to begin with the same
Worn routine the new-opening day — The same?
The same? What lies words are! I had power
To do the needful, — woman's sad dower! —
Power to hold grief in check, lest it maim
Or delay that long journey's slow haste;
Sympathy reached me in look and in word,
Quiet hands finished some poor act half done,
Miles slipped away with the piteous waste
Of my heart's dull patience . . . then I heard
"Here she is!" and my white goal was won.

XIII

THE Florida air of that April night
As it came through the open windows, sweet
From the magnolia blossoms, to meet
And mix with the sweetness of roses bright
And lilies in the darkened parlor's light,
Where white silence rested all about her
Who was the heart of sweetness' low stir —
Oh, the Florida air of that April night!
It lifted the curtains a breathing space,
Then dropped them, slow, to their own folds' right;
It touched the dark hair that lay on her brow,
Crowning the peace and the state of her face —
The Florida air of that April night . . .
I breathe it here now on my hands and brow.

XIV

HURRYING feet, voices strident and loud;
The lifting haze of an October day —
A dawning, rather, gold barring the gray;
Two faces, alone, of the gathering crowd,
A baby face and a mother face bowed
Above it, — faces framed in the rich brown
Of the car window, before the big town
Was astir, — these, these alone, of the crowd!
In the baby's fresh-wakened eyes, a maze
Of growing wonder; her face illumed with pain —
The leaving those she loved with a love past
Any love I have known . . . The lifting haze
A shadow of moan 'neath the gold's glad gain . . .
The last time I saw her — save that white time — the last.

XV

"COVER them over with beautiful flowers"—
The muffled music's voice mourns low,
With ladened hands the people go,
Filling radiant May's last hours
With fragrance born of April showers.
Our soldiers' graves are readily found;
Side by side in the consecrate ground
The dead who have meeded these perfumed hours.
But I seek a cruel word I spoke,
Which died, oh! so long ago—if it be
That words die. I am seeking that grave,
The grave of the cruel word which broke
Your bright face for a minute's length. Oh, see,
I have lilies . . . and rue—but I find not the grave!

XVI

SHE will not have to bear my death — that night
The thought came, a winged thing, to the place
Where lay the hands you had used, the face
You had smiled through. The thought came flashing right
Out of the still fastness where Love keeps light
Winged and spurred, that it may reach earth quick
And succor the poor who are not death-sick
But fall headlong. It saved me in the sight
Of your sealed eyes, that help kindly Love sent.
And if it shocked your new angelhood
Or hurt the heart that I know beats high
In its center, to see that I spent
That supreme hour receiving a good —
You will pardon, remembering I could not die.

XVII

WE sat there an hour talking of you,
Agnes and I, on a bench in Lincoln Park,
Indulging in a mild Saturday lark.
We looked at the lake spreading its gleaming blue
To our very feet, then — we talked of you.
Someway our thoughts sobered and lengthened there,
Dropped all dross, sought for the far chaste and fair, —
Felt the dim sense of sadness that runs through
All beauty like a voice wan with a woe
Long since past. Our eyes on the distant line
Where the silver blue met the sapphire blue,
Speaking as those who are conscious words go
Only on the surface of thoughts' deep mine,
We talked, long and tenderly, Sister, of you.

XVIII

THE long years to come might have divided
Our lives, I know, as no mere crude Death will;
To spend one's whole self in the Now, to fill
Life's uses as a brimming cup, guided
By its needs, demanding, many-sided,
Is all of our human story; the Now,
The total the noblest heart can allow,
Might have slowly, securely divided
Even us. For all of our loving, our care,
It might have come . . . Two women, eager to save
The old-home past — girlhood's dim days at start —
As some beloved dead, Christ-called to share
New earth-life, shrinks and turns back to the grave —
We are spared that resurrection, O Heart!

XIX

WHERE are the two happy girls, tell me,
Who used to drive in the pert dog-cart?
Yes, happy girls,—you arch your brows, my heart,
Surprised to hear tell what you used to be!—
In that Kansas town, blithe, generous, free,
Resting at ease in our father's name,
Carelessly safe in his broad, clean fame,—
"Those Woodman girls, you know!"—you and me!
How you'd "speed" Billy around the track,—
Dear little horse, he thought it was fun!—
Urging and shouting and waving the whip!
And how we 'd follow the calliope back
To "the big tent" . . . You, Dear, still a happy one,
I, watching, wary to give earth's yoke the slip!

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XX

AND when I was putting away your things,
The poor little things you had loved, used, worn,-
Things of earth-use, by memory borne
Quite above themselves, on opaline wings
Flashing far wide the new light that grief brings,—
I found your silver spur . . . your silver spur
And your riding-whip, bits of days that were
Fresh, brave, upspringing as the fairy rings!
And Stella was there, in that green flannel sacque
You traded me for a red opera waist;
Stella, with only one arm and no hair,
A dismal hole in her head — my tears flowed back
From their frozen arrest, warm, sweet to the taste —
The healing of tears came first to me there.

XXI

HOW the rain beats against the window-pane!
All this June day the throbbing heat had hung
Like a shimmering pall; no bird has sung,
Only brooded over and over again
His little bird woes. Now it comes, amain,
In angry rush, with loud insult hurling
Its power broadcast, mocking, unfurling
Slanting sheets of steel — oh, the wind and the rain!
They tell me that when it used to rain so,—
And in Florida the rain falls like lead,—
You would shrink and sob, in remembering pain,
Thinking of our father's grave, where winds blow
Over purple prairies. You felt the dead
Must feel the blows — oh, the rain . . . God, the rain!

XXII

IT 'S a dead sparrow, see, Dear, that I found
On the pavement; a tiny, crushed thing,
Its joyous life stilled in throat and wing—
Too sad a bit to encumber the ground,
So it lies in state on a swelling mound
Of pale garden roses. I am thinking,—
The tiniest death sends my thoughts sinking
Below what seems,—when it fell to the ground
No loving God marked its pain and fall;
Its flutter of life collided—the awe
Of majestic words in this little death's dark!—
With the sequence of things, that is all;
God is only our passion-name for Law,
Law immutable, uncaring, blind, stark!

XXIII

I LOST God, you see, in my doubt's long dark,
And found only Law and Law knows no love;
It does not watch in vast pity above
Our little earth whirling in space, nor mark
The fall of the sparrow, the rise of the lark!
It knows no Father-care, no Christ-tears,
It knows nor passion nor light nor years,
Inexorable, on-going, deaf, stark!
To have told you this, of my pain and loss,
Would have broken us both where we stood;
And if you had stayed here I must have told,
Denied even while I bent under that cross!
To think that you know it now, straight and good,
That comfort has domed my sorrow with gold.

XXIV

DO you know what day it is down here,
O dear Madonna of the Tender Eyes,
Or don't they know of birthdays in the skies?
It 's a precious, precious day, but no cheer
Meets its worth in my heart; with faint, far fear
I wrap pretty gifts about and about,
Winding verses and ribbons in and out,
For it is your baby's birthday — down here.
Seven years old to-day, our gallant boy,
With the speech, the eyes, the heart, all true . . .
Then why the far fear? That no mother sight
Can cull, for him, the world's good from alloy.
His life must blossom and fruit without you —
That 's the spreading blot in this day's large bright.

XXV

OUT in the dark the wild wind is crying . . .
The wind 's in the cottonwoods, and my heart
Is trembling like a little bird astart
With its first passion. I — I am trying
To crush it down, to forget the dying
Dim cadence, but the waves of that river —
The river we knew — mingled forever,
Rising and falling with that wind's crying!
Oh, the waves of that river! Oh, days
That are dead but keep not their tombs!
Oh those violets of the Lakeside woods!
The lights — the lights of that river! The Mays
We played beneath its willows' soft plumes!
The wind to-night is in the cottonwoods!

XXVI

THE ink dries on my pen. The words are wrought
For better, for worse. The end that must close
With incomplete silence our half-dumb woes,
I acknowledge. I have no will nor thought
To make a luxury of grief. I caught
At the first some glimpse of this woe. "The wheel
Is come full circle." Broken, bruised, I seal
In your name all the suffering has taught.
I seal silence henceforth, the high gift meet,
For on my rhyme-grief I must not lean —
That would degrade. I lay these poor words down
At your feet — your beautiful feet! —
Nor raise my eyes — who would grieve the queen?
Not I, who am not worthy to touch her crown.





